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Homework Helper Program, New York City. It Works.

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An after-school tutorial program in which high school students assisted failing elementary school children with reading and homework 2-4 hours a week is described. The children, grades 3-6, were from low-income families, many from minority groups, and were taught in nine centers staffed by a master teacher and several tutors. The program began in February 1963 and operated in summer as well as during the school year until 1967. Evaluation of the 1963-64 school year compared 410 pupils with 185 control pupils on the basis of scores on the New York Tests of Growth in Reading, Level C, Form 1. Those pupils who were tutored 4 hours a week made significant gains over the control group, but the complete experimental group did not differ significantly from the control group. The 240 tutors, tested with alternate forms of the Advanced Level of the Iowa Silent Reading Tests, averaged 3-4 years of reading achievement gain. Analyses of classroom grades, pupil attitudes, tutorial academic averages, and tutorial attitudes were not conclusive. Total cost of the program for the 1963-64 school year was $151,700. (MD)

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TITLE I

HOMEWORK HELPER PROGRAM
New York City

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HOMEWORK HELPER PROGRAM
NEW YORK CITY

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FOREWORD

This project report is part of an independent study of selected exemplary programs for the education of disadvantaged children completed by the American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences, Palo Alto, Calif., under contract with the U.S. Office of Education.

The researchers report this project significantly improved the educational attainment of the disadvantaged children involved. Other communities, in reviewing the educational needs of the disadvantaged youngsters they serve, may wish to use this project as a model - adapting it to their specific requirements and resources.

Division of Compensatory Education
Bureau of Elementary and Secondary Education

THE HOMEWORK HELPER PROGRAM OF NEW YORK CITY

Introduction

High school students helped failing elementary school children with their homework and tutored them in reading. Each child had his own tutor, and the two met for two hours once or twice a week in the afternoon.

The children were in grades 3 through 6 in the elementary schools of an area of the Lower East Side of New York City in which one-third of the housing was classified in 1964 as sub-standard. The median family income at that time was estimated at $69 a week. Puerto Ricans comprised 26 percent of the population; Negroes, 8 percent.

The program began in February 1963 under the auspices of Mobilization for Youth, Inc., a community agency with 110 tutors and 330 pupils drawn from the 16 elementary and 5 high schools in the area. Nine centers were opened, each staffed by a master teacher (licensed by New York City) and a number of tutors. In recent years failing junior and senior high school children have been included in the program with college students as tutors, but no evaluation exists for these years. The program has operated not only in the academic year but also as a summer school. In 1967-68 the program was placed under Board of Education decentralized control, and about 750 tutors were helping about 2,000 pupils.

On testing, experimental pupils who had received 4 hours of tutoring per week were shown to have made significant gains in reading age compared with controls, but not experimental pupils who had received only 2 hours per week. The tutors showed considerable gains in reading age compared with controls.

Personnel

A. Program Coordinator. (A former assistant principal.)

He assumed responsiblity for coordinating all the centers, including participation in the recruiting, selection, and supervision of all personnel. He assisted district superintendents (in the new decentralized program) to develop the Homework Helper Program in their districts.

B. Master Teachers. (Nine or more teachers each with at least 5 years' experience and licensed by the Board of Education of New York City, one per center.)

The master teachers supervised and administered an individual Homework Helper Center. They trained the tutors by day-to-day supervision and guidance, and in afternoon workshops one day a week. They assisted tutors with guidance and instructional problems of pupils when these arose.

C. Tutors. (Eleventh- or twelfth-grade high school students, or, later, college students. Up to 1967, they were chosen on the basis of IQ over 90, reading at grade level or better, school recommendations, and parental consent. As from 1967, the tutors had to be drawn from poverty groups and the basis for selection changed. In 1965, 40 percent of the tutors were male; 60 percent, female.)

The tutors assisted one pupil, for 2 hours one or 2 days a week, to do homework, to learn to read, and to become creative. They played games with the pupil and attended the afternoon workshops for training.

D. Attendants. (Grade school graduates, one per center.)

They kept records of attendance and controlled school supplies.

Custodial services had to be paid for by the program in order to use the school buildings outside school hours.

Dr. Albert Deering has been the program coordinator since the program's inception, and to him goes much of the credit for both the initial success and the subsequent development of the program.

Methodology: General

The stated objectives of the program were:

1) to encourage high school students to remain in school (through economic aid);

2) to present a new opportunity for these high school students to achieve success;

3) to motivate high school students towards improved academic achievement;

4) to expose high school students to a tutorial experience at an age still young enough for them to choose teaching as a career;

5) to provide individual assistance to elementary, junior, and senior high school pupils in the need of help with basic skills;

6) to provide models for the elementary, junior and senior high school pupils, possibly increasing their aspirations for school success;

7) to promote integration through tutor-pupil assignments and activities.

The first objective was met by paying tutors ($1.50 to $2 per hour) for their services. Thus a tutor could earn up to about $35 per month, working 4 afternoons each week. The tutors achieved success (the second objective) through noting the improved progress and interested responses of their pupils. Of course, some pupils did not improve, but it was unlikely that a tutor would have 3 like that. The tutors were motivated towards improved academic achievement, according to the project reports, through their involvement in helping others and by their own improvement (as shown by the evaluation) on standardized tests. Certainly the tutors were given a chance to teach at an early age (the fourth objective), and were offered some basic training in the Monday workshops, as well as during the tutorials, by the master teachers. The fifth and sixth objectives were met by the tutoring. The seventh was met to the extent that rather fewer of the tutors came from minority groups than did the children tutored.

The program used space already existing in the schools, there usually being at least 2 or 3 classrooms available in each school where the program was carried on. In a typical afternoon the tutor would meet his pupil, and they would have some refreshment and a chat before commencing the 2-hour tutorial, which would begin with a 40-minute period in which the tutor would help his pupil through any homework problems. (One difficulty at the beginning of the program was that not all teachers were setting homework, and the tutors had to invent their own learning activities for this period.) Emphasis would be placed on the pupil developing good work habits and study skills.

The second 30 or 40 minutes of the tutorial were used for reading. The materials used were different from those normally available in the schools, being purchased specially for the program.

Thirdly, there would be a 20-minute period of creative activity. This might include some creative writing by the pupil, the use of the tape recorder to record words spoken by the pupil and perhaps his tutor, the making of puppets or models, or the making up of scenarios.

The last period of the tutorial was used for recreation; this took the form of educational games, a wide variety of which were available.

The tutors' training from the master teacher in each center was based from 1966 on the Homework Helper Tutor Manual, prepared by the program coordinator. This manual reflects much of what was taught to

the tutors orally in previous years. After initial orientation to the nature and purpose of the program, the tutors were told something about the developmental characteristics of elementary school children, grades 3 through 6. This was followed by a discussion of the necessity for tutors to consider their pupils as individuals, regardless of what grade they might be in. The manual exemplified the need for the tutor to build up good rapport with his pupil, and included 30 excerpts from tutors' reports which showed how tutors in previous years actually did this.

The coordinator and master teachers of the program were determined that it should work with, not against, the conventional school system. To ensure this, the tutors were made aware of the educational content and curriculum of the regular classroom instruction. The manual contained simplified accounts of the general goals and curriculum of elementary schools in New York City, followed by full statements of the language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, art, music, and health education curricula. Interested tutors were directed to the official Grade Guides of the New York City Board of Education, too. The tutors communicated with the classroom teachers through the master teacher, who conveyed plans for action and reports of progress from the tutor to the teacher, and returned to the tutor suggestions from the classroom teacher for tutoring.

To assist the tutor in developing good work habits and study skills in his pupils, the manual explained that the tutor should explain to the pupil how to do the homework assigned rather than actually doing it. Nine different types of homework activity commonly selected by teachers were cited in the manual, and the tutor was trained to check the pupil's homework assignment book at every meeting. The principle of success leading to success was explained to the tutor in relation to helping pupils with their homework. Again, a set of excerpts from tutors' reports concerning homework were included in the manual.

Since reading comprised a major portion of the tutoring, the manual had a separate section on reading, including not only an explanation of visual and auditory perception but also simple accounts of the 4 basic approaches to word recognition, and of the importance of comprehension and organizational skills in reading. The materials used most to teach reading in the program were explained in some detail next, with notes on ways to use them, again drawn from former tutors' reports. The Readers Digest Skilltexts, the SRA Reading Laboratory, the Catherine Stern Structural Reading Series, the Readers Digest Science Readers, and the SRA Reading for Understanding, and Pilot Library Kits were mentioned. The SRA Word Game Kit and Dolch materials were also available.

Other materials used by the tutors and discussed by them in the manual are counting frames, Cuisenaire rods, science kits, the Mathematical Book Lab, and the Science Book Lab.

A Homework Center newspaper was prepared in some centers, and the tutors helped pupils prepare articles and reports for publication in it. This too was explained in the manual, and was one of the creative activities towards the end of the tutorial period.

Tutors in training also gained ideas of what to do in the re-creation time from the manual. One former tutor wrote about Lotto, for instance; object Lotto, consonant Lotto, and vowel Lotto were all used. Jig-saws and other educational games such as the Scott Foresman Rolling Readers were used too. Another tutor wrote about Password and Hangman; others, about dominoes, checkers, flash cards, and Scrabble for Juniors.

The tutor manual included accounts by former tutors of the use of various audio-visual devices available to them, either continuously or on a loan basis. These included Viewlex filmstrip viewers, tape recorders, a 16 mm projector, and a tachistoscope. The blackboard was used extensively by most tutors of course.

Finally, the manual stressed the need for the tutors to plan their work ahead as carefully as possible while maintaining flexibility, and listed some suggestions for doing so. While plans were not mandatory, reports were, being completed on a daily basis to show the content of the tutorial, the materials and methods used, and any actual products. Comments about pupils' progress were to be entered too.

Methodology: Specific

Excerpts from former tutors' reports are quoted here to exemplify certain aspects of the program:

> A. First get to know your child. I get to know mine as a friend and not as a pupil. I make sure he knows me as well. I find out about his weaknesses, his dislikes, and his ability to work in one session. We start off with homework, if any. I ask him if he understands it fully. If not, we go over what is troubling him, then we proceed. We get ready for reading after I've checked his homework. If I'm using the Reader's Digest, I let him choose the story. He starts off with the key words, then he proceeds in reading. I write down his

mispronounced words. But soon I break in and say, "Here, let me read a couple of sentences." Before I start, I explain to him that he shouldn't chop up his sentences. I tell him to listen to the smoothness in my voice, then I tell him to try what I did in the same manner. I say, "Say a few words at a time, not just one." It seems to work every time. After he finishes, I give him the short exercises from the book and I make up some of my own. We also go over any words that he had difficulty in pronouncing. After reading, we go on to math. We take it part by part. We don't leave a topic until I'm sure he knows it frontwards and backwards. But don't think all we do is work. In between we take time out for pretzels and fruit juice. I mix my reading with speaking. After he finishes his story, we pronounce and spell any mispronounced words. Then we go on to experimentation in science. I take one of our science kits or some of his science study that he has learned in school. We also do work in social studies and spelling and a little music. However, before you start to help the child with his homework or anything else, you should first know your child like you know yourself. We, the tutors, are in a better position than a teacher. We have a one-to-one relationship with the child rather than a one-to-thirty. I want to know my pupil first. I want to know his ability in doing things. I do not mingle in his family affairs unless I see he is troubled by something. I want him to know me as well as I know him. I want him to believe that this is not a second school but a place where he gets help and meets people and has a little fun. When my child is ready to leave for the day and pack his materials, I want to feel that he has really learned something. I do not say "Well it is time to go," and drop it like that, but I always say something cheerful, like "My, you were bright to-day." These children seldom get a chance to hear this at any other time. You should never discourage the child.

B. When I first started to help the kids with their homework, I found that they did not enjoy doing it and I did not enjoy teaching it. I found many ways to make homework more enjoyable. The first way was to let the children do their math homework on the blackboard. The children liked writing on the board so the homework went faster. After the work was corrected, the pupil would copy it on to his paper. For homework in finding the opposite of a word we would play a game of hot and cold. He would tell me the

word he needed to find the opposite of, and I would tell him if the opposite word was displayed in the room. The child would move a certain amount, and I would tell him whether he was getting hot or cold. I also found that if I let the child make believe that he was the tutor it made the homework easier. He would act like I did not know the answer to the homework question. Then the child would have to act like the tutor and give me the answer and explain the answer so that I would understand it.

C. By far the most important materials available to tutors and pupils are the reading materials. These include the Readers Digest and the SRA materials. The Readers Digests consist of a series of editions of reading material for each grade, ranging from 1st grade to advanced readers. Teacher Editions have the answers to the exercises in them. The SRA materials are of 2 types: the Rate Builders which are short selections used to test and improve the pupil's speed, and longer two-page Power Builders used to strengthen pupil's comprehension, vocabulary, and speed. The SRA materials are arranged by color, one color representing a grade level. Each color in both the Rate Builders and Power Builders is divided into 12 selections, each one progressively more difficult. The Readers Digest and SRA materials have exercises on vocabulary, comprehension, and word structure. Neither states in view of the pupil what grade level the selection is designed for. Actually this is a form of deception which doesn't work because any pupil really interested can figure out for himself what level he is working on. Whatever material I was using, I always began with some kind of motivation. The picture at the beginning of the story often served as a starting point. The pupil would speculate about the meaning of this picture, keeping the title of the story in mind. These pictures have more value and importance for poorer readers than for the better readers. I often make a social studies assignment a reading assignment as well. My pupil, Jose, for example, would have to read a one-page story in a social studies work book and then answer questions. I usually follow the same procedure that I use when teaching him reading. In other words, I gave him some discussion in the way of motivation, had him read, and then quizzed him on the material he read. I also made use of the maps in the book and those that I drew on the blackboard. I always have the pupil read silently at first

and then go over the questions. I would sometimes allow him to read aloud after he had read silently. When he had completed the story, I had him do the exercises at the end.

D. The SRA Word Game Kit consists of cards containing short vowel sounds, long vowel sounds, initial consonants, final consonants, diagraphs, diphthongs, blends, syllables, prefixes, and suffixes. I have used these games with my pupils stressing the short vowels and diphthongs. My technique for these games was to play them the same way I would play steal the old man's pack. That is, I place four word cards on the table and give four cards to each player. If the card in one hand matches the card on the table, or if it matches another player's, the player says the word and its sound and then takes the word and its sound; for example, Hat, short a takes Cat, short a. As a result of using these games, the pupil has mastered his difficulty with short vowels and diphthongs. In my opinion, these word games are very good and a help in teaching a certain skill. The pupils like them because they are having fun while learning.

E. The child I have is reading the Catherine Stern Books. He comes in twice a week and can't wait for the reading period. He likes to pronounce the words properly and is eager to read. He usually looks at the pictures which help him to say the words better. He finished the first Catherine Stern book very easily and quickly and is now using the second. He seems to enjoy it. He had problems with his "sh" and "ch" words but he can now pronounce these sounds easily. In order to motivate my child to read, I try to get something interesting for him. I suggest you interest your pupil by giving him a book to read on a subject that means something to him.

F. The Science Book Lab of Mathematical Shapes consists of numerous cards cut into triangles, rectangles, squares, and wedges. There are also built-in plastic tubes and pipe cleaners to connect the pipes. It is fun for pupil and tutor to follow along in the manual. The manual is organized to progress from simple to more difficult projects with the basics discussed at the beginning. The first experiment helps the pupil and tutor to define and understand a line. Next we find out about different types of lines, such as curved lines and straight lines

that are existent in objects in our classroom. The student is then able to learn the differences in two-dimensional flat shapes that are composed of different numbers of straight lines. After each definition, the pupil makes a model of the particular shape with pipe cleaners and tubes. We then experiment with the creation of different two- and three-dimensional figures and find out about their names. Later the pupil finds out about parallel lines and looks around the room for examples. I find that this kit is fun. The construction of complex shapes with the tubes is fascinating to the tutor as well as the pupil. The names of various shapes are taught according to the age and comprehension of the pupil.

G. For me a center newspaper has proven to be a very helpful material for instruction. In order to write an article for the paper, the child must first have an idea. More often than not, the pupil then organizes the facts in some order which is logical to him. While writing the article, the child becomes aware of the spelling, margins, capitalization, punctuation, neatness, paragraphs, and grammar. The child puts a part of himself on paper containing his ideas and his feelings. When completed, the tutor should have the child read his work and check for mistakes. Sometimes a drawing can accompany the article. This too, is reproduced in the newspaper. When the edition is given out in the center, the pupil eagerly searches for his article. When he finds his article, he rereads it and brings it home, shows his family, and brings it to his classroom. The entire newspaper is digested by the pupil who has a natural curiosity to see who, among his friends, has an article in the paper and what his friends have written. This, of course, enables him to practice his reading skills. The newspaper helps the child in a very practical way and gives him a sense of pride towards himself.

H. Marilyn loves to work with the tape recorder. I believe the tape recorder is a great help in reading because she can read aloud while her voice is being taped and is able to hear how she reads. She enjoys this very much. At first Marilyn did not like to read, but as soon as I brought the tape recorder into the room she was willing to read. Marilyn also told me that she makes too many mistakes when she reads. After she heard her

voice she was able to recognize her mistakes. I told her she must concentrate before reading a sentence. Marilyn used to point while reading, and she found this slows her down. I think the tape recorder helped her to speak more quickly.

Evaluation

The only evaluation of this program was made for the 1963-64 year, at which time 240 tutors were employed for 410 pupils, with a stratified matched control group of 185 pupils. Full results were obtained for 356 experimental and 157 control pupils. For both groups, rather over half were Puerto Rican and about 30 percent were Negro. About half were boys in each group. Among the tutors 19 percent were Puerto Rican and 18 percent Negro. About 100 of the pupils had been tutored for 4 hours a week; the remainder, for only 2 hours a week.

A. Measures of Achievement

Pupil reading achievement was measured by pre- and posttesting with the New York Tests of Growth in Reading, Level C, Form 1 (revised), which consists of 56 multiple-choice items and 8 reading passages arranged in order of increasing length and difficulty, and yields a general reading comprehension score with a grade equivalent range from 2.0 to 7.7.

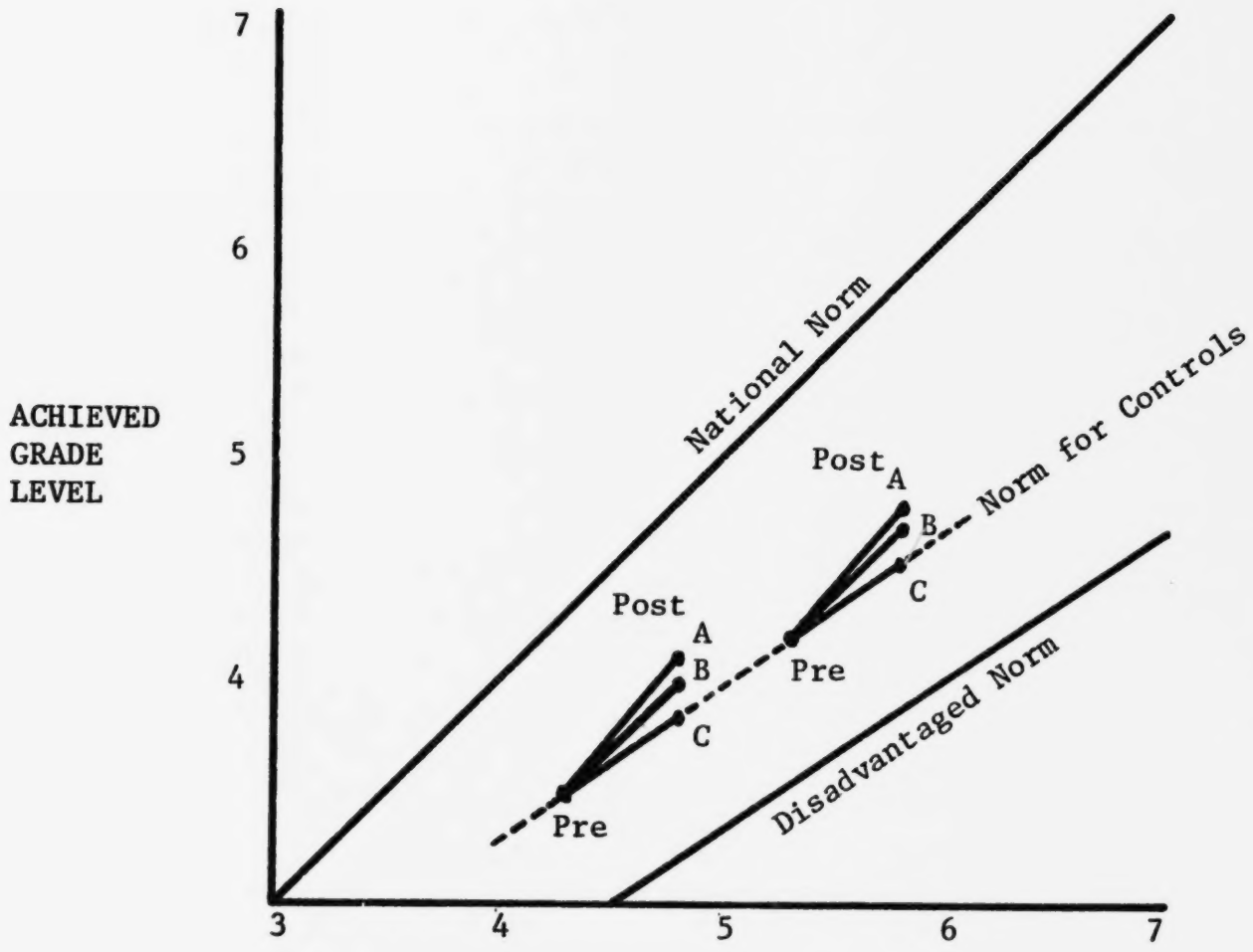
The gains in reading for 3 samples of pupils are summarized in Table 1. It should be noted that the 4- and 2-hour samples' scores were treated separately. This was done because there was no significant difference between the scores of the complete experimental group and those of the control group, whereas the 4-hour experimental sample showed significant gains compared with the control sample.

These results are shown graphically in Diagram 1.

The tutors were also subjects for the evaluation, since there was reason to believe that their reading had improved as a result of their participation. Ninety-seven tutors were compared with 57 controls who were eligible but not selected to be tutors. The selection of tutors was on a random basis for all those eligible.

Diagram 1

GAINS IN AVERAGE READING AGE FOR THREE SAMPLES OF PUPILS IN THE HOMEWORK HELPER PROGRAM



NOMINAL GRADE LEVEL

A Four-hour experimental sample
B Two-hour experimental sample
C Control sample

Note: Since fourth- and fifth-grade scores are not quoted separately in the evaluation, the graph shows gains based on the assumption that average gains for both grades were the same.

Table 1

GAINS IN READING AGE FOR 3 SAMPLES OF PUPILS IN THE HOMEWORK HELPER PROGRAM

Sample	N	Gain in 5 months
Four-hour[a]	100	6 months*
Two-hour[a]	73	5 months
Control	79	3-1/2 months

[a] Since some centers had no 4-hour pupils, these samples were drawn only from centers having both 4-hour and 2-hour pupils.

* Significant, .05, when compared with control sample.

The tutors' reading achievement was measured by pre- and post-testing with alternate forms of the Advanced Level of the Iowa Silent Reading Tests (Revised New Edition), which measures skills in 8 areas: rate of reading, comprehension of short articles, rapid reading for specific details (directed reading), poetry comprehension, word meaning, sentence comprehension, paragraph comprehension, and skills useful in library research. The raw scores for each of the subtests can be rendered as standard scores, and the median of the subtest scores is used as a total score for the battery. The Quick Word Test, a test of verbal facility, was also administered.

Pretesting showed experimental and control samples to be closely comparable on both tests. The experimental sample had a nominal grade level of 10.7 and an achieved or actual grade level on the Iowa Test of 9.9, whereas the controls had an achieved grade level of 10.1 for the same nominal grade level, 10.7. The range was considerable, however, with about 20 percent of each sample reading below the eighth grade. On the Quick Word Test, the means for both samples were well below the norm.

In the seven months of tutoring between testings, the experimental sample averaged 3.4 years of achievement as measured by the Iowa Test, while the control sample gained 1.7 years on average. Practice with the complex test probably accounted for some portion of these considerable gains, and it is likely that the control sample in fact progressed only at a pace which would be shown by line C on Diagram 2. This line is parallel to the norm and shows the control sample as gaining 7 months of achievement in 7 months of schooling. The gain for the experimental sample, adjusted by the same amount, is then reduced to 2.4 years, as shown by line A on Diagram 2.

Table 2

GAINS IN AVERAGE READING AGE FOR TWO SAMPLES OF TUTORS IN HOMEWORK HELPER PROGRAM

Sample	N	Gain in 7 months	Adjusted gain in 7 months
Experimental	97	3.4 years***	2.4 years
Control	57	1.7 years	7 months

*** Significant, .001, when compared with control sample.

B. Other Evaluation Indices

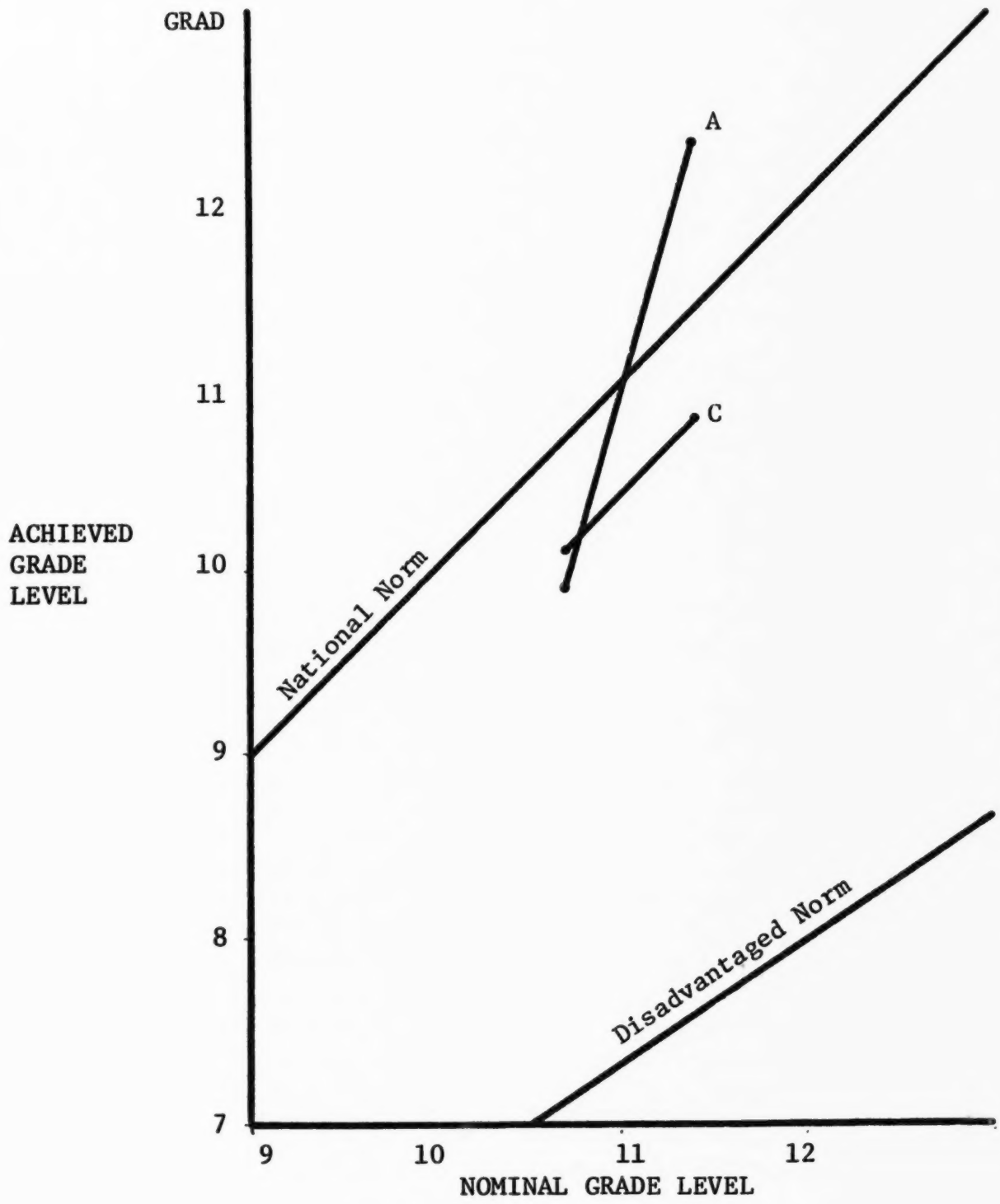
Data were collected for some of the pupils for teacher-assigned grades in reading, spelling, mathematics, science, and social studies; on behavioral ratings in work and study habits, social behavior, and written and oral participation; and on school attendance. Unfortunately, complete sets of data were not available, and no adequate analysis could be carried out.

Pupils' attitudes and aspirations were tested by questionnaire. Analysis of answers showed no significant changes over 5 months. The tutor-pupil relationship was examined for Negro and Puerto Rican pupils, to determine the effects of sex matching and ethnic mixing. None of the results was conclusive, although it did appear that for Negroes sex-ethnic matching might be important.

For the tutors, academic averages were collected, but the analysis failed to show any relationship between improved reading scores in the program and school performance.

Diagram 2

ADJUSTED GAINS IN AVERAGE READING AGE FOR TWO SAMPLES OF TUTORS IN THE HOMEWORK HELPER PROGRAM



A Experimental sample
C Control sample

Tutors' attitudes and aspirations were tested by questionnaire, and were shown to be highly positive both at the start and at the end of the evaluation period. No significant differences were apparent from the statistical analysis.

Pupil attendance had been over 80 percent; tutor attendance, over 90 percent.

C. Modifications and Suggestions

The evaluation occurred early in the life of the program, consequently a number of changes was made based on its results. The need for four hours a week tutoring rather than two was quite apparent, and now the program operates so that a pupil is tutored Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday. Tutor training sessions are held on Fridays twice a month, while a 2-week orientation session has been introduced before tutoring began.

Budget (1963-64)

1	Project Coordinator	
14	Master Teachers	$ 49,100
11	Attendants	
2	Project Secretaries	
240	Tutors	$ 85,000
	Supplies and Equipment	$ 7,600
	Custodial Services	$ 10,000
	Total	$151,700

These are quoted as examples only, and should be adjusted to present prices and for the greatly expanded nature of the present program. In 1963-64, the cost per pupil per hour was probably about $4, taking into account hidden costs such as office accommodation.

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* Cloward, R. D. Studies in tutoring. Journal of Experimental Education, Fall 1967, 36(1), 14-25.

* Deering, A. R. The Homework Helper tutor manual. New York: Homework Helper Program of Mobilization for Youth, Inc., and New York City Board of Education, June 1966.

* The Office of Education is collecting this material for placement in the ERIC system. Items may be obtained either in microfiche or hard copy.

Other Sources Not Quoted

Deering, A. R. The development of the Mobilization for Youth Homework Helper Program: A case study. Dissertation Abstracts, 1967, 27(11).

For More Information

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